

May 16, 1961

Dr. Leo Szilard
Hotel Dupont Plaza
1500 New Hampshire Avenue, N.W.
Washington 6, D.C.

Dear Leo:

I would certainly give great force to the moral and political considerations in your petition and memorandum of May 10. If I'm not signing the petition it is not because of a fundamental disagreement with your views. You yourself have stressed the complexity of the problem, and the difficulty that may attach to the invariable pursuit of a consistent policy. For this reason, at least until we have a much clearer picture of what our policy is to be, I fear that there may be more harm than good to making too emphatic a public expression of the critical views that are embodied in these documents. We may expect to find that these indictments are used against us in an unreasonable and unpredictable way by our opponents. I therefore think we might try to wash our dirty linens in a more private fashion as a first tactic. Until the full force of such a policy is evident, I would, therefore ask you not to include my name in any public statement of adherence to your petition. I would also urge you to consider the wisdom and perhaps also the practicality of conducting your presentation of this petition in the same fashion. I have every hope that the Kennedy administration will come forward with a constructive program for the future to which we can all adhere in a positive fashion.

With best personal wishes,

Yours sincerely,

Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics

SZILARD, L.